Ethnicity Monopoly: Ulster-Scots Ethnicity-Building and Institutional Hegemony in Northern Ireland

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Abstract

Ulster-scots is a contemporary case of ethnicity-building, materialising in Northern Ireland at the end of the twentieth century. As the "Troubles" began to be reinterpreted as being *about* cultural identity in the 1980s, avenues were sought through which to find a "Protestant-ness" comparative to the considerably more developed discourse of Irishness. It was at this point that Ulster-Scots emerged. While its initial decades were marked by derision, hostility, and resistance, it has gained considerable ground in recent years. This article outlines the development of Ulster-Scots from its beginnings in the late 1980s to the present. Utilising in-depth interviews with a variety of current and historical actors, I contend that this development entailed three phases. First, grass-roots educationalists operated independently while unionist elites lobbied for official recognition. In a second phase, the official recognition and institutionalisation of Ulster-Scots in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement initiated a process wherein the Ulster-Scots Agency came to be established as the key player in the field. A third phase began in the early 2010s with the Agency establishing a monopoly over the processes of Ulster-Scots peoplehood-making.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Peoplehood, Ulster-Scots, Northern Ireland, Nation-building

Ulster-Scots is a contemporary case of peoplehood construction, emerging as a discourse in the latter stages of an ethnically inflected civil war. It is demonstrative of the capacity of ethnically framed conflict to produce new identities and transform established ones (Brass, 2003; Brubaker, 2004), as well as the potential for peace-building processes to

provide openings for leverage-gaining by ethnic entrepreneurs. Across the political spectrum in Northern Ireland, Ulster-Scots has been viewed since its inception with suspicion, broadly understood to be an attempt to invent a Protestant language, culture and identity with which to compete with the discourse of Irishness. Hence, it has been described as a unionist weapon in Northern Ireland's cultural war (Mac Póilin, 1999), and 'a risible attempt to promote a marginally used tongue as a political gambit' (Radford, 2001, p. 51). However, its inclusion in the Northern Ireland Agreement ("the Agreement" herein) in 1998 institutionalised the idea of Ulster-Scots in the form of the Ulster-Scots Agency. Although horizontal legitimation did not instantly follow its vertical affirmation and legal recognition (Níc Craith, 2000), Ulster-Scots has become an increasingly salient (Stapleton and Wilson, 2004) and socially accepted discourse in Northern Ireland. In recent years, it has become not unusual to hear anachronistic, even "everyday primordial" accounts of Ulster-Scots which place its origins in the mists of time.

This article describes the development of the notion of Ulster-Scots identity in Northern Ireland from its beginnings in the late 1980s to the present. As a relatively new peoplehood movement, Ulster-Scots offers the opportunity to map the stages in the development of ethnic identity which has its origins in the late twentieth century. Whereas most ethnicities and nationalities experienced their period of "revival" in the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, the Ulster-Scots movement has its origins in the last few decades. Drawing upon forty-two semi-structured interviews with a variety of current and historical actors, including political elites, teachers at Ulster-Scots Flagship schools, Ulster-Scots Agency workers, and others, I offer a concrete narrative of this development. I contend that this development entailed three phases: in the first, grass-roots educationalists operated independently, as unionist elites lobbied for recognition; in the second, the official recognition and institutionalisation of Ulster-Scots in the wake of the Good Friday

Agreement initiated a process wherein the Ulster-Scots Agency came to be established as the key player in the field; and, in the third, the Agency has been established as a monopoly over Ulster-Scots peoplehood.

The notion of Ulster-Scots as a language, culture, and ethnic identity began to be discussed from the late 1980s. After the "Troubles" moved from the high-intensity violence of the seventies into more predictable patterns of low-intensity intractable conflict (White, 1983; McKittrick *et al.*, 1999), interpretations of the conflict began to undergo something of a cultural turn (Níc Craith, 2003; Gilligan, 2007; Finlay, 2010). Concerns over equal rights for Catholics and alternative solutions to the "constitutional question" gradually gave way to its description as, primarily, an 'ethnically framed conflict' (Brubaker, 2004, p. 166). While identity talk was 'in the air' in the 1970s, it was not until the cultural turn of the 1980s that it came to the fore (Gilligan, 2007, p. 602). In contrast to Irishness, Northern Ireland's Protestant community's apparent lacking a coherently articulated cultural identity was brought into sharp relief (Aughey, 1995; Finlay, 2001). It was in the wake of these social forces that the notion of Ulster-Scots began to take form.

At the beginning of the nineties, Ulster-Scots began to be promoted by a small group of unionist and loyalist elites. Amid widespread public ridicule from both nationalists and unionists alike, the movement quickly gained official recognition through its inclusion alongside Irish in the Agreement (Northern Ireland Agreement, 1998). In its wake, Ulster-Scots gained not only official recognition, but its own governmental institution, the Ulster-Scots Agency, and allocated considerable funding for its promotion. One of the core areas through which the Ulster-Scots Agency has aimed to promote Ulster-Scots in Northern Ireland has been through school-based education. While the Ulster-Scots Agency has been attempting to do so since its creation, it has gained greater reach and central coordination of

Ulster-Scots education through the 2010s. In doing so, the Agency has managed to gain a monopoly over the discourse and meaning of Ulster-Scots.

This article contains five sections. In the first section, I discuss the theories of ethnic identity building utilised in this study. Second, I provide a brief outline of Ulster-Scots. The third section briefly sets out the methods utilised in undertaking the research, while the fourth details its findings. I conclude by discussing several tentative lessons for scholarship in peoplehood-building which can be drawn from the Ulster-Scots case.

Peoplehood Building

A multitude of definitions of, and distinctions between, different categories of peoplehood are found within the academic literature. Various distinctions between ethnic, national, racial, and other such categories (such as the conceptualisation of the nation as an ethnicity with a claim to statehood) and descriptions of their contents (such as language, culture, heritage, genes, physical features, shared values, and so on) exist and are utilised both societally and within the academic literature. However, as Brubaker (1996, 2004, p. 4) has effectively argued, just because these 'groupist' distinctions are frequently employed by such actors does not mean we should uncritically adopt these as our units of analysis. Rather, the content of these discourses should be included within our analysis. Wacquant (2016, p. 1081) contends that this family of categorisations can be considered as subsets of "ethnicity," as ethnicity itself 'is defined by shifting and woolly criteria that operate inconsistently across institutional domains and levels of the class structure, such that it does not produce a coordinated alignment of boundaries in symbolic, social and physical space.' This is not to say that societal conceptualisations of these various categories are not important; only that what differentiates them is neither constant nor absolute.

Rogers Smith (2003, 2015) offers a productive terminological and schematic way forward in this regard. Smith employs the term 'peoplehood' to encompass all forms of discourse where claims of being "a people" are made, ranging from small-scale organisations and local affiliations, through ethnic, national, and state identities, to international and universal affiliations. Given that differentiations between various forms of peoplehood are not pre-discursive, the maintenance of rigid boundaries between the study of the social construction of ethnicity, nationality, and other such forms is problematic. As such, regarding the particular case study in hand, I utilise theories of peoplehood-building originally intended for nationalism studies in order to analyse the construction process of a regional ethnic identity.

In this article, I utilise and build upon Hroch's (1985) A–B–C model of small nation formation. According to this model, national "revivals" develop by passing through three temporal phases. In the initial phase, the 'period of scholarly interest,' an association of concerned individuals, typically intellectuals, collect and study the (alleged) characteristics of the nation, such as its language, culture, and history (1985, pp. 22). In the second phase, the 'period of patriotic agitation,' politically active groups lobby for greater public recognition of the national group and its idiosyncrasies (1985, p. 23). These patriots function as the 'driving force' in the construction of a mass national movement, organising in combinations with others 'already dissatisfied with the limitation of interest to the antiquities of the land, the language and the culture,' and who share their desire for the 'spreading of national conscious among the people' (1985, p. 23). A third phase is reached with the rise of a national mass movement.

While Hroch's model remains both productive and influential (Maxwell, 2010), his work is fundamentally groupist in its conception of nationalism. His analysis of the development of national movements largely assumes the basic building-blocks of the nation –

its identity, cultural features, historical narrative, and so on – to be essentially concrete realities prior to the national scholarship which purports merely to unearth them. Critics of such approaches argue that these various features ought to be considered products of invention (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2012) and collage (Smith, 2003). In contrast to such groupist approaches, Brubaker (2004, p. 13) argues for the necessity of critically analysing how such notions of communal difference come to be 'proposed, propagated, imposed, institutionalised, discursively articulated, organisationally entrenched, and generally embedded in multifarious forms of "governmentality"'.

Hroch is by no means alone in focusing on powerful actors and/or groups in the construction of ethnic and national identities. Wimmer (2013, p. 69), for example, includes 'political mobilisation' as one of his key means of ethnic boundary making. According to Wimmer, both the powerful and subordinate actors have the potential to 'mobilize sections of a population in order to carry the weight of mass opinion into the public arena and to make their vision of the relevant ethnic divisions politically salient' (2013, p. 69). Rogers Smith (2003, p. 32) also contends that processes of peoplehood-building involve a variety of actors; however, he argues that such mobilisations include 'constrained, asymmetrical interactions between actual and would-be leaders of political communities and the potential constituents for whom they compete.' As such, processes of peoplehood-building involve both the asymmetric, top-down power of elites and the simultaneous restraint of such elites as to which peoplehoods and narratives they can utilise in articulating the "people" they aim to describe. For Smith (2003, p. 34), these constraints include the pre-existing 'senses of membership, identity, and affiliation, with entrenched economic interests, political and religious benefits, historical and cultural attachments, and animosities' within the target population. As I discuss in more detail below, the rise of Ulster-Scots in Northern Ireland is very much in line with elite-centred descriptions of peoplehood-building. While both

grassroots actors and political elites have played roles in its creation, the process of ethnic narrative production has been fundamentally asymmetric, structured by political, economic and bureaucratic power differentials.

In the case of Ulster-Scots, the separation of Hroch's phases A and B is problematic both temporally and in terms of the overlap in personnel (and their interests). Scholarly interest has at no point been politically neutral in its construction. The process of ethnicity exploration and collaging was – and continues to be – primarily undertaken and moulded by political-cum-cultural actors. If separable at all, the primary period of "scholarly interest" has largely followed, rather than preceded, successful agitation. It was not until Ulster-Scots was allocated political, financial, and bureaucratic power in the form of the Ulster-Scots Agency that such an undertaking was adopted in earnest.

An important difference between Ulster-Scots and the small nations utilised in Hroch's analysis is the political-economic structure in which it arose. Hroch overlays his A–B–C model upon several stages of political-economic development: pre/post bourgeois revolution and the rise of capitalism, the onset of the industrial revolution, and the rise of a working-class movement. In contrast, Ulster-Scots arose in the context of post-industrial capitalism, Thatcherite neoliberalism, and a civil-war economy. Between 1961 and 1991, the level of employment in the manufacturing sector in Northern Ireland had fallen by more than 70 per cent, 'while jobs in private services increased by 54% and employment in the public sector increased by a staggering 158%' (Shirlow and McGovern, 1996, p. 393). By 1993, public financing from Westminster represented 35.8 per cent of Northern Ireland's GDP, and the lack of employment opportunities was buttressed by a disproportionately large public sector. By the early 1990s, parity-of-esteem financing of ethno-cultural projects had become one of the most dependable mechanisms to funnel grants to ethnopolitical bases. For Hroch (1985, p. 23), Phase B is 'made possible by the establishment of objective relations of

economic, political and other types'. As I discuss in more detail below, this was certainly the case for the rise of Ulster-Scots.

Hacker-Cordon and Miley (2007) outline four key mechanisms described in the constructionist literature around national consciousness: nation-building from below, from above, and two from the 'middle' (bureaucracy monopoly and education-indoctrination). The former two represent, respectively, conceptualising the production of a national consciousness as evolving out from "the people" in a bottom-up process, and, second, as being constructed by ruling elite in a top-down process. In the latter conception, national consciousness develops from the middle. Bureaucracy monopoly exists where certain forms of linguistic or cultural capital are rendered advantageous on the labour market, leading to the construction of a national consciousness. An alternative form of nation-building from the middle comes from education-indoctrination, through the establishment of a 'monopoly of legitimate education' (Hacker-Cordon and Miley, 2007; Gellner, 2008, p. 33). In this article, I contend that gaining a monopoly over the sphere of education marked a key turning point in the ascendency of the Ulster-Scots Agency. Gaining sole patronage over its development and spread, the Agency has achieved considerable control over the Ulster-Scots peoplehood narrative into the future. However, the control of the Agency over Ulster-Scots education renders it more commensurate with top-down, rather than middle-out, processes.

Having discussed the theoretical framework of the study, I now turn to the case study under consideration in this article: the Ulster-Scots movement.

Ulster-Scots

Ulster-Scots burst onto the Northern Irish political scene in the 1990s. It gained notoriety initially as a language, promoted as a long-subjugated dialect of Scots (Görlach, 2000). The movement was also widely understood to be a conspicuous attempt to produce a

Protestant linguistic equivalent of the Irish language (Mac Póilin, 1999; Níc Craith, 2000, 2001; Radford, 2001; Crowley, 2006; Gardner, 2015). Its colloquial register and use of words previously considered to be local slang, combined with attempts to maximally differentiate its spelling from standard English (Mac Póilin, 1999), rendered it open to media scorn (McCall, 2002). However, the derision of Ulster-Scots is not merely a response to its "folksiness," but also to the apparent new-found interest many loyalists and unionists seemed to have suddenly developed in the fields of linguistics, cultural heritage and literary history. This opposition has been heightened further by the considerable flow of public finances apportioned to translation and funding.

For many of its promoters, however, ethnic identity and cultural practice have always been central to the Ulster-Scots movement. However, pursuing linguistic legitimacy was considered to be the most immediate and potentially fruitful tactic for gaining cultural and ethnic legitimacy. Hence, the promotion of Ulster-Scots as a language took centre-stage through the 1990s and early 2000s, as Lee Reynolds, Information and Community Outreach Officer for the Heritage Council[1], explained:

> There have been many attempts to define cultural rights, but whenever they have done they've found the language aspect much easier to define than the cultural. So, what began as a process of cultural rights recognition ended up language rights recognition with some cultural rights attached. As they examined the issue and tried to define it, it got reversed in what was the original intention. So, we ended up with a model where to secure our cultural rights we had to go heavy on the language rights.

Hence, it has only been since Ulster-Scots gained linguistic recognition that it began to be promoted in earnest as an ethnic and cultural "revival." This said, even amongst promoters and supporters of Ulster-Scots, its nature remains a highly contested notion. As one

interviewee stated, 'Through all your research I'd be surprised if any two people say the same thing' (Jane Wallace, Ulster-Scots Agency education officer). Broadly speaking, the division of interest between the cultural and the linguistic breaks down along class lines, with working-class engaging with the former and feeling alienated from the latter (McCall, 2002).

In terms of linguistic ability in Northern Ireland, according to the 2011 census (NISRA, 2013a, 2013b), the first census to include the question, 8.08 per cent of the population (around 140,000 people) claimed to have some ability in Ulster-Scots. By way of comparison, this figure for the Irish language was 10.65 per cent. Age, gender and religious profiles for Ulster-Scots also differ from that of Irish. Whereas ability in Irish is most prevalent among the young and least so for older age groups, Ulster-Scots linguistic ability was most common among the oldest age groups. One in four Ulster-Scots speakers are over the age of fifty-five. In terms of gender, males are more likely than females to have some ability in Ulster-Scots (53.1 and 46.9 per cent respectively), while the reverse is true for the Irish language for which 47.8 per cent are male and 52.2 female. The religious divide in linguistic ability is particularly stark. Of those with some ability in Irish, fully 90 per cent are Catholic and only 7.4 per cent Protestant. For Ulster-Scots, meanwhile, 79 per cent with some ability are Protestant, while Catholics make up 17 per cent.

[Table 1 about here]

Importantly, however, the level of Ulster-Scots linguistic ability does not necessarily correspond to the level of identification, and 'a knowledge of the language is neither necessary nor sufficient for a sense of Ulster-Scots identity' (Stapleton and Wilson, 2004, p. 571). When the figures for Ulster-Scots linguistic ability are compared to that of espousing Ulster-Scots identity, the state of religious bifurcation becomes clearer. Comparing the

figures for self-identification from a 2010 Omnibus survey (Carmichael, 2010) to those for linguistic ability from the 2011 Census provides a rough insight into this divide. Whereas the figure for self-identification among Protestants was considerably higher than that of linguistic ability, for Catholics it appears likely that Ulster-Scots linguistic ability and self-identification are more closely aligned (see table 1). This would seem to suggest that, in the absence of linguistic ability, Ulster-Scots identity resonates almost exclusively with Protestants in Northern Ireland.

Thus far, we have discussed the theoretical framework for peoplehood building employed in this study and outlined the key parameters of Ulster-Scots. In the following sections, I briefly summarise the methods utilised in undertaking this research and subsequently outline the findings of the study.

Methods

This paper forms part of a larger project analysing the evolution, content, and political significance of the Ulster-Scots movement. The empirical data utilised in this article include forty-two semi-structured interviews conducted between 2014 and 2016. Participants included twelve sitting MLAs[2] within the Belfast assembly at the time, teachers from twelve Ulster-Scots Flagship (primary) schools, seven past and present staff members and associates at the Ulster-Scots Agency, three central figures active within the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council, and other actors involved in Ulster-Scots education. In terms of selection for participation, the MLAs interviewed represent the proportion who responded to the invite to participate in the research, sent to all MLAs at the time. The twelve schools included in the research were randomly selected from the twenty-four Northern Irish schools within the Ulster-Scots Flagship scheme at the time. Other interviewees were selected due to their involvement in the Ulster-Scots movement. The interviews touched on a variety of topics

relating to the development of, rationales for, and content of Ulster-Scots and Ulster-Scots education. All interviews were recorded, selectively transcribed, and organised thematically. The data pertaining specifically to the historical development of the Ulster-Scots movement was utilised to develop this article.

Three Phases of Development

Ulster-Scots education has been established through three phases of development. The initial phase involved the rise of disparate inclusions of folk-stories, music, poetry and literature by grass-roots educationalists starting perhaps as early as the latter years of the eighties. In parallel, unionist political elites had begun in this period to lobby for its official recognition and establishment at the governmental, legislative and programmatic level. A second phase, beginning with the Agreement and the creation of the Ulster-Scots Agency in 1998-1999, involved the beginnings of interaction between grass-roots educationalist actions and centralised bureaucracy, of the provision of funding and educational materials, and its promotion by the Ulster-Scots Agency within schools previously outside of the purview of Ulster-Scots education. The early 2010s have heralded a third phase, in which grass-roots activists have become the minority in, and even at times excluded from, the mainstream of Ulster-Scots education. In this phase, the Ulster-Scots Agency fully monopolised and escalated the dissemination of the school-based teaching of Ulster-Scots.

Phase One: Grass-Roots Education, Elite Lobbying

The idea of Ulster-Scots began to disseminate through certain unionist currents of thought in the late eighties and early nineties. The Ulster-Scots Language Society was formed in 1992, producing the first publication explicitly about, and partly written in, Ulster-Scots the following year (Níc Craith, 2003; Gardner, 2015). In the final decade of the conflict, prior

to the signing of the Agreement in 1998, there emerged a small number of grass-roots educators who began to teach Ulster-Scots in schools. These educators were varied in approach, independent in action, and multifarious in their interest in the subject. Although I was informed of this through my interviews, only two participating interviewees stated that they were active in the pre-Agency period: Mr Robertson[3] and Willie Drennan. Mr Robertson stated that his interest in doing so began in the mid-eighties and was centred largely around linguistic and literary interests, especially the work of W. F. Marshall and Robbie Burns. Although Mr Robertson claimed to have been teaching Ulster-Scots 'for over 30 years,' he remained ambiguous over whether or not the description of his earlier teaching as lessons "in Ulster-Scots" were retrospectively reconceptualised as such. Both Drennan and Mr Robertson expressed concern about the running of the Ulster-Scots Agency, both administratively and in terms of its conceptualisation of Ulster-Scots peoplehood (see *Phase Three* below).

Willie Drennan is a prominent grass-roots Ulster-Scots promoter who engaged with Ulster-Scots education through this initial phase. Having developed a burgeoning interest in County Antrim localism whilst teaching folklore and traditional music to children in Canada through the nineties, Drennan returned to Northern Ireland to continue this project. Initially, he secured temporary funding from the Arts Council to provide Ulster-Scots education to schools through his "Ulster Folk Orchestra Association". This constituted the first organised, funded educational project of its kind. According to Drennan, his funding was redirected after the establishment of the Ulster-Scots Agency at the behest of prominent individuals within the DUP. At least from his perspective, from the early 2000s, grass-roots Ulster-Scots education had begun to be taken captive by unionist political elites and centralised in the hands of the Ulster-Scots Agency.

One of the central figures in the early establishment of the Ulster-Scots project at the political level was DUP MLA, Nelson McCausland. He had become involved with the

Ulster-Scots movement in 1992, and was instrumental in the launching of the Ulster-Scots

Heritage Council three years later, acting as its first chairman and later as its director. The

Heritage Council brought together 'all the organisations which were in some way Ulster-

Scots-related … under one umbrella,' in part due to a shared sense of marginalisation. One of

the aims of the Heritage Council, after its creation in 1995, was the inclusion of Ulster-Scots

into education, and much effort was directed toward lobbying for funding from the

Community Relations Council, the Council for the Curriculum, and political elites directly.

However, it was not until several years after the creation of the Ulster-Scots Agency that

substantial resources for Ulster-Scots education were procured. In line with other

interviewees, McCausland described incorporations of Ulster-Scots prior to this point as

being 'very much driven by the enthusiasm and the passion of a principal or a teacher.'

The Heritage Council was led by a small group ranging from those on the fringe to the

centre of the unionist political elite. McCausland, who chaired the Council, had been elected

in Northern Ireland's 1989 local elections as an Independent Unionist, moving to the UUP in

1993. Colin Robinson, who served as Cultural Outreach Officer, was an activist for the

Progressive Unionist Party[4], while Lee Reynolds, who became the Information and

Community Outreach Officer, was at the time a member of the UUP, famously contesting

James Molyneaux for the leadership of the party in 1995[5]. In the nineties, Reynolds became

active within unionism, contending for recognition of class inequalities, as well as for

linguistic and cultural recognition of Ulster-Scots. In 2011, Reynolds replaced Ian Crozier to

become one of the DUP councillors sitting on the Belfast City Council, while Crozier moved

his current role of chief executive of the Ulster-Scots Agency. John Erskine and John

McIntyre, known as the "twa[6] Johns," both founding members of the Ulster-Scots Language

Society in 1992, were also central figures in the Heritage Council. So too were other Ulster-

Scots intellectuals, such as Dr Philip Robinson, author of *Ulster-Scots: A Grammar of the*

Traditional Written and Spoken Language (1997) and other books on Ulster-Scots language and history. Given the structural position of its personnel, the council had the capacity to wield considerable leverage in the political sphere at the time. The timing of their participation was also instrumental, taking place in the four-year period between the 1994 ceasefires and the 1998 signing of the Agreement. The "two-community" model and the rhetoric of parity of esteem as central components of the peace process at the time meant that a "Protestant" language/culture to correspond to Irish(ness) was politically expedient (Gilligan, 2007).

Subsequent to its creation in 1992, the Ulster-Scots Language Society began to produce its publication, *Ullans*, in which articles on Ulster-Scots heritage, culture and politics, linguistic and literary history, and new poetry, prose and translations from English were printed (Gardner, 2015). A central function of this publication was, essentially, to engage in Ulster-Scots ethnolinguistic apologetics. For Ulster-Scots, the creation of *Ullans* in the early nineties 'essentially … constituted the initiation of a new print community' (Níc Craith, 2003, p. 82).

By 1998, Ulster-Scots had gained enough traction amongst unionist elites that it was put forward for inclusion in the Agreement along-side Irish. Article 3 of the Economic, Social and Cultural Issues section states:

> All participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland (Northern Ireland Agreement, 1998).

According to Lee Reynolds, this achievement "was basically down to us [the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council]. If we hadn't been about four years previously, if we hadn't been hammering on the doors, if we hadn't been raising it – it would not have been there." Much to the Heritage Council's frustration, the wording of its inclusion within the Agreement extended to Ulster-Scots the same rights and protections as Irish, but fell short of granting it official recognition as a language. It would take subsequent years of lobbying to achieve this status. However, as Reynolds himself pointed out, the most fruitful outcome of the Agreement for promoters of Ulster-Scots was the establishment of the Ulster-Scots Agency: a governmentally funded institution constructed in order to facilitate the public promotion of Ulster-Scots. However, the dynamics underpinning the creation of the Agency were perceived by the Heritage Council as undesirable in both intention and results:

> The funding bodies didn't want to recognise us and didn't want to include us. We ended up with our own Agency because they wanted to basically just shove us in there and get us away from them. But … when somebody says you're now going to get a million pounds spent on you, it's a bit difficult to say, you know, what about all the other ones who aren't spending tuppence on us. That has actually proven to be a longer-term problem where Ulster-Scots go to the Ulster-Scots Agency whereas Irish can go everywhere. We've been sort of pigeonholed in terms of recognition and funding.

Indeed, perceived inequalities in funding and recognition between Ulster-Scots and Irish under consociational democratic governance have been a repeated source for claims of cultural discrimination by unionists and promoters of Ulster-Scots. However, the centralisation of Ulster-Scots activities into a single governmental agency, alongside the

comparative newness of Ulster-Scots in the sphere of language and culture, has rendered it comparatively much more organisationally concentrated than Irish.

In sum, this initial phase of peoplehood construction involved multiplicity in Ulster-Scots. A variety of differing conceptualisations of it arose, and aspirations for it were diverse. While disparate grass-roots educators taught Ulster-Scots according to their own interpretations and emphases, unionist elites lobbied for official recognition. With the success of the latter in achieving its inclusion in the post-conflict governmental structure, Ulster-Scots entered a new phase in its development.

Phase Two: Centralisation

The establishment of the Ulster-Scots Agency in 1999 produced a situation in which a fledgeling ethnic "revivalist" movement without a wide-spread base of popular support was apportioned considerable political and economic power. No mass movement preceded its instalment; on the contrary, vocal opposition to the idea of Ulster-Scots was widespread, even among much of its target population. Nor did there exist an established notion of what Ulster-Scots should include. Its contours were unclear, and its core features rather multifarious.

As a result of the Agency's response to the situation it found itself in, this second phase in the development of Ulster-Scots involved three core elements: patriotic agitation, peoplehood scholarship, and centralisation. First, in the wake of its establishment, the Agency set about the business of increasing Ulster-Scots' recognition, legitimisation and spread in identification at both official-legal and societal levels. Essentially, in Hrochian terms, the Agency began a process of 'patriotic agitation', campaigning for the societal recognition of Ulster-Scots culture, language, heritage, music and dance, and identity. Importantly, the Agency aimed to raise awareness not only at a broad societal level, but specifically among those whom they consider to be Ulster-Scots, practice its culture, and/or are native speakers.

A second core element of this second phase was the engagement in peoplehood scholarship. By "peoplehood scholarship" I mean something similar to what Hroch (1985, p. 22) terms 'scholarly interest': the engagement in exploration, documentation, and systematisation of the nature, content, key features, and narrative of the sense of peoplehood in question (Hroch, 1985; Smith, 2003, 2015). However, where Hroch viewed this as a process of description, I contend that the process is far from mere discovery. Even though the actors themselves may believe in earnest that their activities merely represent a process of "finding" the features of the identity (and this certainly was the case for my participants), this process is, in fact, one of creative accumulation and collaging. It involves the amalgamation of various societal and historical features which can be legitimately claimed as being associated with the identity in question (Smith, 2003, 2015). For Ulster-Scots, this has mostly taken the form of anything associated with the "Protestant community" and/or connections between what is today Scotland and Northern Ireland. However, even by the time this research was carried out, 17 years after the creation of the Agency, there was little agreement over what constituted Ulster-Scots. As one of the education officers at the Agency stated: "Through all your research I'd be surprised if any two people say the same thing."

As described earlier, the Ulster-Scots case proceeded rather differently to Hroch's schema in terms of temporality. Unlike in Hroch's depiction, the phase of 'scholarly interest' did not precede its 'patriotic agitation' but occurred in parallel, often undertaken by the same actors. In other words, it was not (only) independent scholars who engaged in peoplehood scholarship, but politically active agents. Furthermore, with the dissemination of awareness of Ulster-Scots as the Agency's central remit, peoplehood scholarship became professionalised, backed by governmental and financial support. In conjunction with having the economic and institutional structures to undertake this practice, the Agency had been rendered the official voice for Ulster-Scots. As such, the power to set the Ulster-Scots

peoplehood narrative became asymmetrically structured. Its peoplehood scholarship had become institutionally centralised.

Third, and relatedly, this phase witnessed the gradual centralisation by the Agency of a broad spectrum activities which could legitimately be claimed as Ulster-Scots. Through this period, they began to provide funding for festivals, educational events, and community groups which the Agency deemed to be within the scope of Ulster-Scots culture, language, and heritage. The Agency also became particularly active and interested in the sphere of education, as it offered the potential not only to reach the next generation, but also to gain ground among the broader population.

In 1999, John Laird was made both a UUP life peer and the first chair of the Ulster-Scots Agency. Laird had been a member of the unionist elite since his election to parliament in 1970 and was later appointed to the position of Chair by David Trimble, then UUP leader and Northern Ireland's first First Minister. With Trimble, Laird had been 'a member of the Ulster Society for a quite considerable length of time' and became interested in the Ulster-Scots project in the early 1990s (Mac Póilin, 1999). According to Laird, much energy in the early years of the Agency was dedicated to fielding off opposition to Ulster-Scots throughout the island of Ireland. Laird described his own efforts in publically challenging alleged opposition to the Agency's aims by the Irish government[7] after the creation of the North/South Language Body[8]: 'The first thing that I had to do was to confront the dislike of Ulster-Scots by the republicans … and the Dublin government.' For Laird, however, these public clashes were instrumental in gaining traction amongst unionists in Northern Ireland:

> The Protestant, unionist community did what it always does, and that is: when it thinks the Dublin government is against it, then it must be alright. … I'm putting it very crudely, but that is it. If we could show that the Irish government were *totally* against what we were doing, then we were on the road to success, and the road to

getting a lot of people to support us, which is *exactly what we did*. Much to their

considerable annoyance. I mean, the amount of restrictions they – the amount of work

that they did to try and stop us was unbelievable, but it was too late – too late, too late

– the genie was out of the bottle.

Laird resigned from the post in 2004 over funding cuts to the Ulster-Scots Agency (BBC,

2004), as well as in response to, in his words, the 'considerable hammering from the Dublin

government' the Agency had allegedly received.

Following Laird's resignation, Mark Thompson was appointed to the position of

chair. It would appear that this change in personnel was emblematic of something of a change

in direction for the Agency. Most of the central decision-making figures within the Agency

have had direct involvement in the political sphere in Northern Ireland. Thompson, by

contrast, came from a background in graphic design, his trajectory into the Agency a result of

'doing some work with the Northern Ireland Office.'[9]

Under Thompson, a more positive-slanted public relations strategy became the key

focus of the Ulster-Scots Agency. A decade of media critiques in which Ulster-Scots was

presented as being merely a mouthpiece for loyalist claim-making and an exploitation of the

discourse of culture to express sectarian bigotry left the Ulster-Scots Agency wary of such

connections. Indeed, the defensiveness and unease of participants from various spheres of

Ulster-Scots promotion, both past and present, where any link to unionist-loyalist politics was

raised during interviews is a testament to the continuing legacy of these concerns. With

public relations increasingly to the fore, the Ulster-Scots Agency engaged in various

strategies of marketing, drawing upon Thompson's prior experience in graphic design. It

disseminated information on a variety of platforms, including radio and TV, booklets and its

webpage, showcase events, and it relocated its offices to create a "shop front" in Belfast. It

began to engage more seriously in the development and dissemination of Ulster-Scots

education, funding and supplying educational materials, lessons in music and dance, and workers for schools, and running after-school clubs and annual summer schools.

The "Ulster-Scots Project for Primary Schools" project had been established by the Agency at Stranmillis teacher training college in 2002, and in 2003 this remit was expanded to include a Post-Primary Project (Stranmillis, 2006). Through the mid to late 2000s, the Agency spent time 'quality checking' and promoting the use of the educational materials produced through Stranmillis, as well as working to disseminate and trial their use within schools. According to Thompson, their entry into schools was relatively smooth, initially concentrating their 'limited resources on the places where the teachers were already on side'. However, in a turn common among Ulster-Scots promoters (Gardner, 2017), its low take-up rates were explained by an alleged 'cultural characteristic of the Ulster-Scots community' of being 'quite relaxed, quite laid back.'

Contrarily, other interviewees from the Agency described methods taken to overcome a widespread suspicion and resistance they encounter within schools. These interviewees discussed the use of promotional events of various kinds in order to gain the trust of teachers of parents, as well as the interest of pupils. Gary Blair, an education officer in the Agency, explained the efficacy of a public engagement project in 2007 in achieving this:

> I think the mould was broke by a play called *Fair Faa Ye* ... it taul[10] ye the story o' Ulster-Scots from the earliest days tae modernity. … I think it opened the eyes o' teachers I think every bit as much if not mair[11] than the pupils. They were so taken by the content, and it made Ulster-Scots safe, and it made Ulster-Scots interesting, and it made it educationally inviting.

It was through this period of public relations that the Ulster-Scots Agency began to gain ground in terms of school-based engagement.

Over this period, the Agency began to establish communication with isolated grass-roots Ulster-Scots educationalists, offering assistance, support and funding. Through this process, various grass-roots actors began to be co-opted into the terrain of the Agency's reach. Willie Drennan, for example, was employed by the Agency to continue his work visiting schools, speaking and performing at assemblies, and running workshops. He presented an Ulster-Scots educational programme for the BBC entitled *A Danner Wi Drennan* in 2008, which included documenting some of his school visits. Through the 2000s, the Agency also began to work with teachers who were already informally discussing Ulster-Scots ideas in their lessons, such as Mr Robertson (see above).

The experience of the Agency in its first decade was rather mixed. While gains were made in terms of their acceptance and visibility socially and within the education sector, it was also marked by various scandals, such as the arrest of the first chief executive, John Stan Mallon, in 2002[12] (The Herald, 2002), Lord Laird's alleged spending of hundreds of pounds on taxis between Belfast and Dublin (Gordon, 2005), and the misuse of funding scandal (BBC NI, 2009). While this period was characterised by parallel actions by the Ulster-Scots Agency and other actors, anxieties over the increasing control of the former were palpable among grass-roots interest groups. This concern was vocalised in the editorial to the 2004 edition of *Ullans* (2004), contending that the Agency 'should in no way be confused with any of the Ulster-Scots community-based groups. … [Our] members will be aware that the recruitment criteria for Agency staff … cannot be expected to produce specialist, committed and interested staff.'

Despite these various issues, the Agency was able to gain considerable ground in terms of patriotic agitation, peoplehood scholarship, and centralisation over the course of this decade. Since 1999, considerable governmental funding has been allocated to the Agency, most notably with the promise of £12 million over five years in the 2005 budget, and the

further boost of three million over three years in the wake of the St Andrews Agreement in 2006 (DCAL, 2014; Northern Ireland Executive, 2008). In terms of public engagement, perhaps the most effective area was found to be in the field of education. While developments in this area were relatively gradual, they laid the groundwork for the production and implementation of the large-scale, centrally coordinated educational schemes of the 2010s. At this point, the Ulster-Scots movement entered a third phase in which the Agency gained unequivocal dominance in the process of peoplehood-building and a monopoly over education.

Phase Three: Ethnicity Monopoly

Since the early 2010s, the Ulster-Scots Agency has gained a monopoly over Ulster-Scots peoplehood. Where the second phase involved the coexistence of parallel and multifarious Ulster-Scots projects, the third phase is characterised by the ascendancy of the Agency. The three elements of the Agency's actions in the second phase – patriotic agitation, peoplehood scholarship, and centralisation by the Ulster-Scots – continued to be undertaken in the third, but from a position of dominance. In the sphere of peoplehood scholarship, for example, the Agency still engages in considerable exploration; however, much of the ground-work, directionality, and core principles for this were established in the 2000s.

Considerable asymmetry exists in the designating the contours of Ulster-Scots language, culture, heritage, and identity. For, example, the Agency's 2014-2016 Corporate Plan lists as one of their four strategic aims that it 'will identify, interpret and animate Ulster-Scots heritage, language and culture' (Ulster-Scots Agency, 2014, p. 11). This declaration is also stated on the guidelines accompanying the Ulster-Scots funding application form (Ulster-Scots Agency, 2018). With all publically funded Ulster-Scots projects applying for

sponsorship centrally, the Agency now wields considerable bureaucratic power over deeming the meaning and content of Ulster-Scots peoplehood.

This third phase has involved considerable advancements in the production and implementation of Ulster-Scots education. By the end of the 2000s, the Agency had begun to introduce more concrete schemes for educational provision, such as the Peripatetic Tutor Programme (PTP) in 2008. This programme provided lessons in traditional music and both Highland and Scottish Country dancing to schools across Northern Ireland (Campbell, Eydmann and Gunn, 2013). In terms of substantive education, the inclusion of Ulster-Scots in the education system through the 2000s and early 2010s had been almost entirely primary-school based. Beyond its inclusion as a topic in "Local and Global Citizenship", the introduction of Ulster-Scots into secondary schools would necessitate the construction of a full Ulster-Scots curriculum as a formalised subject.

In November 2012, however, the Agency launched the Ulster-Scots Flagship Schools Award, awarded to (Primary) schools who 'demonstrate eighteen continuous months commitment to Ulster-Scots in school life' (Ulster-Scots Agency, no date). The Flagship scheme represents the most concrete and ambitious Ulster-Scots educational programme to date, establishing routine and continuous Ulster-Scots education within a specified number of schools under their purview. Much of the education is undertaken directly by the Agency within the schools, through after-school projects, school plays, school trips, special assemblies, and even specific classroom-based lessons. Other lessons are delivered by teachers within the school, informed by the materials and guidelines provided by the Agency. Subjects offered in the Flagship scheme include history and heritage, culture, literature and poetry, theatrical performance, language, and music and dance. By the spring of 2014, a small number of primary schools had received the Flagship Schools Award, and a further

forty-four were either working towards it or on the waiting list having applied to join (Ulster-Scots Agency, no date; Campbell, Eydmann and Gunn, 2013; NSMC, 2013).

The Ulster-Scots Flagship scheme marked a turning point in the educational monopolisation of the Agency over the Ulster-Scots peoplehood narrative and discourse. Grass-roots Ulster-Scots educators were joined by others who relied much more heavily on the Agency for teaching, materials, and information. Almost all of the teachers from Ulster-Scots Flagship schools interviewed for this research were in the latter category, most of whom expressed having little to no prior knowledge of Ulster-Scots before engaging with the Agency. While almost all such teachers expressed a sense that it reflected the culture of the school's "community", many of the primary rationales provided for joining the Ulster-Scots Flagship project were economic. In the context of austerity, the free educational services offered by the Agency were viewed as means of alleviating restraints in school budgets. Ulster-Scots education in these schools was undertaken almost exclusively by the Agency. As Ms Anderson, a participating teacher from a Flagship school explained, her approach was to 'let the children learn about their culture … from the professionals, as such, rather than us.'

As school engagement began to increase rapidly through the 2010s, the Agency began to expand its aims. Trina Somerville, the Agency's Director of Education and Language, described their recent turn toward a more assertive strategy.

> We're at the stage where we're talking to the Department of Education, we're going to be meeting CCEA, and we're going to be looking then to say you need to get the message out to schools to say this *has* to happen, this *is happening*. Because, you know, its fine for us to look at courses and to look at subjects where it can be embedded, but we need the buy-in and the support from the department of education saying: yes, this is good – this *has* to be done.

A central aim of the Agency for the future of Ulster-Scots education was its wholesale inclusion across all levels, including a GCSE and A-Level in 'Ulster Scots language, heritage and culture.' This latter aim was, indeed, announced by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in 2012 (Meredith, 2012); however, interviewees at the Agency recognised this as a somewhat distant ambition. Nonetheless, dominance in the arena of peoplehood-building has been firmly established by the Agency, having consolidated its position as the sole body providing Ulster-Scots educational services. In doing so, it has gained a monopoly over the knowledge and narratives about Ulster-Scots within schools: a step in the direction of 'education-indoctrination' in peoplehood production (Hacker-Cordon and Miley, 2007).

It would appear that grass-roots actors within the Ulster-Scots movements have been largely excluded, pushed to the margins, or assimilated into the Agency. Grass-roots educationalists interviewed as part of this research expressed feelings of alienation toward to Agency and concern over its orientation. Mr Robertson contended that he had 'very little faith in the Ulster-Scots Agency,' critiquing it for its alleged disorganisation, financial mismanagement, and conceptualisation of Ulster-Scots. As he saw it, the problem with the Agency is that 'they want to politicise it and make it Protestant.'

Willie Drennan also expressed a variety of concerns regarding both the running of the Agency and its approach to Ulster-Scots. Regarding the former, he viewed the organisation as overly 'top-down' in its approach, excluding non-Agency voices: 'they're the "experts", and I'm just a boy on the ground, you know'. In relation to the content of Ulster-Scots, Drennan critiqued the Agency for what he perceived as a disconnect between the "real" cultural history of the region and the official version of Ulster-Scots being promoted by the Ulster-Scots Agency:

> It's all sort of … plastic paddie. … It's fair enough that they would promote Scottish
>
> Country dance because there was a *wee* bit of that, I *suppose* – maybe a dozen people

did it in the 1900s. … But the traditional dance that they should've been promoting was known as "country dancing." … Every area from North Down and Antrim, the main social activity was these dances, in a big barn or a big front room of a house, or a local hall, that's what people *did* … That was real, you know – that was our cultural tradition. And yet, because it didn't have "Scotland" to it, you know. I mean, this is the thing on the image – [for the Agency] it's all about Scotland, but it [should be] about what we did *here*.

In other words, Drennan felt that the ideology underpinning the principles of peoplehood scholarship undertaken by the Agency differed from his own approach, silencing alternative peoplehood narratives.

Due to a variety of disagreements between Drennan, the Agency, and the unionist political elite, his connection to the Agency was ended in 2009. Drennan viewed this as a deliberate move by the Agency to remove him from being 'the face of Ulster-Scots' as, according to him, he 'didn't fit into their agenda,' 'don't align with any political party,' and 'didn't fit into their ideal of what an Ulster-Scot should be doing.' Hence, Drennan found himself excluded from the Ulster-Scots educational project through the 2010s. For Mr Robertson, while the school in which he teaches continues to be incorporated within the Ulster-Scots Flagship scheme, he expressed feelings of alienation from the Agency. He expressed the view that, especially in recent years, his perspectives on Ulster-Scots had been pushed to the margins.

In sum, since the early 2010s, the Ulster-Scots movement has become a highly centralised and institutionalised project, with the Agency holding a monopoly over the process of ethnicity-making. Although the institutional structures necessary for this ethnicity monopolisation were established with the GFA and the subsequent creation of the Ulster-Scots Agency, it was not until the early 2010s that the latter established the scope of their

activities, gained dominance in the sphere of Ulster-Scots peoplehood-making activities, and achieved the operational capacity necessary for their monopolisation of the field. With Ulster-Scots education now entirely under the jurisdiction of the Agency, it wields considerable power to write the Ulster-Scots peoplehood narrative for the next generation, as well as to render it normative as a conception of group boundaries in Northern Ireland.

Conclusion

This article has provided an in-depth analysis of a contemporary case of ethnicity-building. From this research, I suggest that two tentative lessons may be deduced for the study of peoplehood-building processes. First, the substantive elements of Hroch's three phases were found to be useful in considering the rise of a peoplehood. These elements are: scholarly interest, patriotic agitation, and mass movement. Drawing on the work of Rogers Smith (2003, 2015), as well as that of Hroch, I use the term "peoplehood scholarship" to describe the process of inventive collage through which various cultural features, both historical and current, are "discovered" to be elements of the identity under question. For Ulster-Scots, this has largely involved uncovering and appropriating a broad spectrum of local features which have resulted from the connections between the province of Ulster and Scotland.

Second, Hroch's conceptualisation of peoplehood-building as developing through temporal phases was also found to be effective. Certain moments and turning points in the lifespan of peoplehood projects establish new realities and shift the potentialities for their development and dissemination. For Ulster-Scots, these turning points were its inclusion in Northern Ireland's peace accord and post-conflict institutional structure at the end of the 1990s, and the firm establishment of the Agency's monopoly over the peoplehood narrative in the early 2010s. However, it is important to point out that the precise phases which Hroch

outlined were not found to be the case for Ulster-Scots. Scholarly interest did not precede patriotic agitation, nor were these activities undertaken necessarily by different actors. Rather, these features occurred simultaneously, with peoplehood scholarship gaining considerable pace after the creation of the Agency. In fact, locating and appropriating allegedly "Ulster-Scots" features – its cultural characteristics, historical figures, heritage objects, standardised linguistic rules, ethnic idiosyncrasies, and so on – became a necessity for its everyday functioning.

Hence, drawing upon Hroch's model, I suggest that outlining turning points and phases is an effective strategy for modelling the processes of peoplehood-building, specifically focusing on the variety of competing peoplehood conceptualisations produced, the mechanisms through which certain versions become dominant while others are excluded, the political and social outcomes of patriotic agitation, and the different structural positions from which peoplehood scholarship is undertaken. Smith (2003) rightly points out the need to analyse power asymmetries in peoplehood-making. In line with this approach, this research suggests that describing the evolution and formation of such asymmetries will be effective for explaining how certain notions of collective identity come to be rendered hegemonic.

The Ulster-Scots movement has resulted in a highly centralised, top-down structure, with the Agency exercising a monopoly over the definition of its content and contours. Furthermore, having become the only player in the production of Ulster-Scots education, the Agency has gained a 'monopoly of legitimate education' (Hacker-Cordon and Miley, 2007; Gellner, 2008, p. 33). As the influence of the Agency continues to grow, and its reach extends, Ulster-Scots peoplehood may yet become an unquestioned discourse, or even an ethno-cultural "mass movement."

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[1] The Ulster-Scots Heritage Council was an association of Ulster-Scots-promoting groups, formed in 1995 (see also Níc Craith, 2003).

[2] Members of Legislative Assembly.

[3] All names of people and places associated with specific schools were anonymised.

[4] The PUP is a leftist party aiming to represent working-class, loyalist areas.

[5] Doing so out of a discontent with the UUP's leadership at the point of the Downing Street Declaration of 1993.

[6] Two.

[7] In reality, it would appear that this largely took the form of accusations being publicly leveraged against the Irish government by Lord Laird himself (see, for example, Millar, 2000; Tanney, 2001).

[8] This is a council which was formed in the wake of the Northern Ireland Agreement. It involves two agencies: Foras na Gaeilge (the agency responsible for the promotion of the Irish language throughout the island of Ireland) and the Ulster-Scots Agency.

[9] The Northern Ireland Office is the department of the British government responsible for Northern Irish affairs.

[10] Told.

[11] More.

[12] John Stan Mallon was arrested and charged in relation to a child sex offence.